

## **Black Friday & Holy Friday**

*"Thy Kingdom Come ...on earth as it is in Heaven"*

"TIMOTHY, my son, hasten to come to me quickly; for Demas abandoned me, *having loved the present age*, and went to Thessalonica... at my first defense no one stood by me, but all abandoned me...But the Lord stood by me and empowered me, that through me the preaching might be fulfilled, and all the nations might hear; and I was delivered out of *the* mouth of *the* lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* for His kingdom, the heavenly *one*, to Whom *be* glory to the ages of the ages. Amen (2 Tim 4:9-22)."

*Black Friday* and *Cyber Monday* inaugurate the birth of Christ in our culture. St. Paul sat in prison and was abandoned by a co-worker whose love for comfort outweighed putting himself at risk to go and support him. Nevertheless, Paul shares how our Lord stood by him and empowered him to continue preaching the gospel even while imprisoned. The question each must answer is to what extent has our love for the present age caused us to abandon the work we have been called by God to accomplish? The Orthodox Church offers a remedy that is not only the greatest gift to us from God – the privilege to worship God in Spirit and Truth but perhaps Orthodoxy's greatest offering to the world as well. At the heart of the early Christian faith was the experience of the Kingdom of God having been *announced, inaugurated and given* by and in Christ (Fr. Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, p. 29)."

The birth of Christ marks the coming into the present age of the Kingdom of God. The world as a gift from God finds its ultimate meaning and purpose in relation to His Kingdom having now entered into it. Our life in this world becomes a preparation for life in His Kingdom. Being *hectic* during the "holidays" is a great American pastime that is filled with social gatherings, decorations, baking, and shopping. Living frantically however, can become a distraction from Church attendance, taking time away from prayer and doing good deeds for others.

We as Orthodox Christians have been entrusted with the Divine Liturgy which satisfies an inner thirst for living in Christ and God abiding in us. We have prayer and fasting, which stand as the necessary actions which allow us to experience of *the Kingdom of God* having come to this present age and permeates how we choose to live in it. The Nativity of Christ is preceded by a 40 day period of preparation and invitations to *come and see*. It begins with Christ calling His first disciples, Philip (Nov. 14), Andrew (Nov. 30), Peter and Nathaniel to "Come and See" *the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world*. On November 21, we celebrate the *Entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple* and *come to see* human beings as the dwelling place of God and His Kingdom.

The coming weeks are filled with examples of saints who came to Christ, were filled with the Holy Spirit and provide lights to shine the way for us to live. December 4 –St. Barbara, December 6 - St. Nicholas, December 9 – St. Anna, December 16,17,18 the

liturgies for the Prophet Haggai, Daniel the Prophet and Saturday Vespers, Christmas Eve: the Royal Hours and the Liturgy of St. Basil and on Christmas Day the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. *Is all this being offered by an outdated, out of touch Church that thinks it's a monastery or is it God's gift to us, given so that we do not abandon our first calling to live in the present age not as the rest of the world does without having seen the Light of God but having seen and believing in the Light, we now live in and for His Kingdom.* Is not "Black Friday" really the absolute antithesis of "Holy Friday" - the day on which God reveals this world as coming to an end and His Kingdom having come! Chrysostom: "Let us labor in the concerns of God, not in our own, or rather really in our own, for His are our own . . . What then do I speak of as His? His glory and His kingdom. These are His, and ours for His sake."